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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/ERA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PO

SUBJECT: PORTUGAL RELUCTANT TO NAME NATIONS IN U.S.-EU
SUMMIT DECLARATION

REF: SECSTATE 57696

Classified By: Dana M. Brown, Pol-Econ Officer, Embassy Lisbon
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Portugal would like to keep the U.S.-EU Summit declaration language on Latin America general, according to MFA Director for American Affairs Helena Coutinho. Regarding Cuba in particular, Coutinho said the EU preferred private engagement on human rights issues and was concerned that "singling Cuba out" in the declaration would only alienate the Castro regime. She did not react to the suggested language on Venezuela. Coutinho agreed that the mention of a U.S.-Colombian Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would be fine, but raised concerns that mentioning the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) without mentioning other groups that take captives (such as the National Liberation Army (ELN)) would be unbalanced.

¶2. (SBU) Coutinho stated that including specific language on three Latin American nations would also leave out other areas of concern, such as Bolivia. Poloff stressed that the U.S.-EU declaration offered an important opportunity to take note of problematic situations of mutual concern rather than use general references to issues in the region. Coutinho responded that the Slovenian presidency would be in charge of coordinating the final language on behalf of the EU states. The Portuguese MFA had no comment on the reftel's language on missile defense.

¶3. (C) Comment: Portugal's significant expat population in Venezuela (totaling around 500,000) and growing economic relationship makes the GOP gun-shy about any public language Caracas could interpret as condemnatory. During the past several months, we have noticed a shift in tone among our working level contacts, who have been increasingly dismissive of concerns about the direction of Venezuelan democracy. In the past, they claimed to share U.S. concerns about political developments and to press Venezuelan officials in private about them. Now, our contacts mostly listen politely when we raise Venezuela. We suspect the GOP has decided that active political and economic engagement is the most effective way of protecting their substantial number of citizens and addressing Chavez's troubling actions. End comment.
Stephenson